

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 ACDA-12 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 /085 W
-----003624 201613Z /43

P R 201512Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8555
INFO AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 4166

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, EC
SUBJECT: ARBITRARY DETENTIONS BY MILITARY GOVERNMENT

REF: (A) QUITO 3989; (B) QUITO 3558;

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: LIBERAL PARTY LEADER PEDRO JOSE ARTETA WAS RELEASED JUNE 17 AFTER SERVING FOUR DAYS FOR IMPUGNING THE HONESTY OF SUPREME COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENT MEMBER GEN. GUILLERMO DURAN. CHARGE MET WITH SUBSECRETARY OF GOVERNMENT JULY 19 TO EXPRESS USG CONCERN ABOUT A RECENT SERIES OF ARBITRARY ARRESTS, OF WHICH THE ARTETA CASE WAS THE LASTES. END SUMMARY.

2. PEDRO JOSE ARTETA, FORMER LIBERAL PARTY DIRECTOR AND CURRENTLY RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA'S CAMPAIGN DIRECTOR, WAS RELEASED JUNE 17 FOLLOWING A FOUR DAY JAIL TERM. ARTETA HAD PUBLICLY CRITICIZED REMARKS MADE BY SUPREME COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENT MEMBER GENERAL GUILLERMO DURAN ARCENTALES (REF A), AND HAD HINTED THAT DURAN HAD USED HIS OFFICE FOR PERSONAL FINANCIAL GAIN.

3. ARTETA'S ARREST FOLLOWED ON THE HEELS OF THE RELEASE
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OF MISAEL ACOSTA, A MEMBER OF POPULAR DEMOCRACY AND A WELL-KNOWN SCIENTIST AND JOURNALIST, WHO HAD SERVED A SIMILAR JAIL TERM FOR CRITICIZING THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, WHOM HE HAD TERMED INCOMPETENT AND UNFIT FOR HIS JOB. THE ARTETA AND ACOSTA ARRESTS WERE CLOSELY PRECEDED BY THE ARREST OF DEMOCRATIC LABOR LEADER JULIO CHANG ON THE PERSONAL ORDER OF COL. (R) JORGE SALVADOR,

MINISTER OF LABOR (REF B), FOR INSULTING REMARKS AND THE ARREST AND SHORT DETENTION OF THE PRESIDENT OF ECUADOR'S OLYMPIC COMMITTEE. THE LATTER HAD THREATENED TO CRITICIZE IN THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE THE GOE'S RECENT DECREE REGULATING SPORTS.

4. CHARGE CALLED ON NEWLY-APPOINTED SUBSECRETARY OF GOVERNMENT, ENRIQUE LEON GARCIA JULY 19 TO EXPRESS CONCERN OVER A RECENT SERIES OF ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS OF INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE BEEN PUBLICLY CRITICAL OF THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT. HE EMPHASIZED THAT SUCH ACTS, JUST BEFORE THE ELECTIONS, ARE LOOKED ON NEGATIVELY BY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC OPINION. LEON DEFENDED THE GOE ACTIONS, SAYING THAT ARTETA HAD VIOLATED A LEGAL PROVISION REQUIRING THAT ANY INDIVIDUAL WHO ACCUSES A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL OF MALFEASANCE MUST PRESENT PROOF.

5. COMMENT: ARTETA'S AND ACOSTA'S REMARKS WERE Milder THAN CRITICISM COMING FROM OTHER QUARTERS AND THEIR ARREST DEMONSTRATES NOT ONLY THE SENSITIVITY OF GENERAL DURAN AND OTHERS TO SPECIFIC CRITICISMS BUT ALSO THE CAPRICIOUSNESS OF THE MILITARY. IN THE MIDST OF A VIGOROUS ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN, THE ARRESTS SERVE TO REMIND ECUADOREANS THAT THEY ARE STILL GOVERNED BY A MILITARY DICTATORSHIP, NO MATTER HOW MILD.

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6. ALTHOUGH WE HOPE THAT THE CHARGE'S EXPRESSION OF CONCERN TO LEON WILL CAUSE THE MILITARY TO HESITATE BEFORE REPEATING SUCH ARRESTS, WE ARE DOUBTFUL THAT GIVEN THE PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR HERE, THE MILITARY WILL QUIETLY SUFFER WHAT IT REGARDS AS INSULTS TO ITS PERSONS OR TO ITS INSTITUTION.

7. ARTETA'S ARREST MAY SERVE TO HELP THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN OF RAUL CLEMENTE HUERTA. HUERTA IS OFTEN ACCUSED OF BEING THE GOVERNMENT'S OFFICIAL CANDIDATE AND THE ARREST OF HIS CAMPAIGN MANAGER CAN BE USED AS EVIDENCE TO THE CONTRARY. ARTETA HAS ALREADY PRIVATELY EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT HIS ARREST GAVE HUERTA A BOOST. HOWEVER, CYNICS ON THE OTHER SIDE ARE COMMENTING THAT ARTETA'S ARREST WAS TOO NEAT BY HALF AND THAT IT WAS A PLOY JOINTLY ARRANGED BY THE LIVERALS AND THE MILITARY TO GIVE THE LIE TO THE THESIS THAT HUERTA IS SUPPORTED BY THE GOVERNMENT. IT SHOULD ALSO BE NOTED THAT HUERTA HAS CHOSEN TO PLAY THE ARREST VERY SOFTLY. THE PROTESTS CAME FROM THE LIBERAL-BASED COALITION THAT SUPPORTS HUERTA; THE CANDIDATE HAS REFRAINED FROM MAKING PUBLIC COMMENT ON THE INCIDENT.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, DETENTION, MILITARY GOVERNMENT, POLITICAL PRISONERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978QUITO04166
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780257-0089
Format: TEL
From: QUITO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780640/aaaabiic.tel
Line Count: 117
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 99ad4685-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 QUITO 3989, 78 QUITO 3558
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2283870
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ARBITRARY DETENTIONS BY MILITARY GOVERNMENT
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, EC
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/99ad4685-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014